Rights to Safety and Speech Explained

SIGN THE PETITION with your midd email: https://c.org/HrNFpjbZy7

What's happening at Middlebury?

Right now, the Trump administration is pressuring colleges and universities to crack down on students, faculty, and staff for speaking their minds about issues impacting people of color, religious minorities, LGBTQ+ and immigrant communities. On October 1, President Trump pushed a coercive "Compact for Academic Excellence in Higher Education" to nine colleges (not including Middlebury) that seeks to restrict free speech and academic freedom, end DEI programs, limit the number of international students, and exclude transgender and nonbinary students from gendered spaces. On October 13th, it was expanded to target ALL institutions for higher education in the country – including Middlebury.

Even before the compact, we already experienced attacks on free speech on our very own campus. This past summer, during a CIA information session held at Middlebury Language Schools, two students peacefully shared educational pamphlets about the CIA's involvement in global destabilization and violence outside Axinn Center. These students were threatened with disciplinary action from the college for "violating Middlebury Handbook policy" – policy which currently allows college administrators to retroactively define any form of expression they do not like as a "protest" subject to certain rules and regulations. These students were targeted with arbitrary charges because they shared information that the government deems controversial and threatening. If this is our college's basic response to two students pamphleting, what does this say about their potential reactions to further dissent?

What should we do?

- We must change Middlebury College's representative model to reflect the tight-knit, inclusive values of our community. College structures are top down and representative instead of truly democratic, and current student voices are overwhelmed by administration
- We must pressure Middlebury College leadership to take concrete action to protect the rights of all students, including the rights to free speech and assembly, and to not

proactively work with government agencies to infringe on these rights or to target students, no matter their immigration status.

- We must show support for students, faculty, and staff who are being targeted or punished for the lawful exercise of their right to freedom of expression, including the right to protest.
- We must protect all of our rights to peaceful expression of our beliefs.

How do we do this? What are we demanding from our college leadership?

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1. **Reject** the compact**:** Passionate students and faculty at the seven universities who have outright rejected the compact so far were integral in resisting Trump's coercion. Through student government resolutions, petitions and rallies, community members at MIT, USC, UPenn, Brown, Dartmouth, UVA and University of Arizona were able to successfully urge their university presidents to reject the agreement. Those efforts must be emulated at Middlebury.
2. **Prohibit** Middlebury College from voluntarily sharing its resources – including staff time or the data they collect on students and faculty – with federal law enforcement who are seeking to violate our civil rights or target members of our school community based on their exercise of civil rights. In September, UC Berkeley handed over the names of 160 faculty members and students to the Trump administration as part of an investigation into "alleged antisemitic incidents", exposing those community members to deportation, expulsion, job loss, harassment, and surveillance. The message Berkley's capitulation sends is that the government can use accusations of antisemitism to target anyone who says things they don't like. We need to be proactive so this never happens at Middlebury.
3. **Provide** Middlebury College community members with the resources they need to be safe. This includes free, confidential legal consultation for Middlebury College students, employees, and immediate family members on issues of immigration, and all assistance needed to remain on campus legally – such as more access to low cost or free summer housing options for students who are unable to leave the U.S. when classes are not in session.

4. **Revise** Middlebury Handbook policy (including, but not limited to Section D.2. ID Cards and Section B.2.b. General Conduct Policy) to require Middlebury officials to provide proof of their own identity before demanding students present identification. Currently, our Student Handbook B.2.b states that "Students are expected to identify themselves by showing their Middlebury identification card upon request of Middlebury officials." With increased law enforcement presence in our communities, it is only logical that students are not pressured into providing proof of identity without knowing who is asking.
5. **Clarify** that pamphleting and social media use are not 'demonstrations' or 'protests' covered by the Middlebury Handbook, and as core expressions of free speech must be free of restriction by the college.

What if taking action draws negative attention to Middlebury and ends up hurting our community?

We believe our community is under attack no matter what. We might as well do something about it. This referendum seeks to put in place measures to *protect* the most vulnerable members of our community. Silence will not protect us – our biggest danger is anticipatory compliance.

If we don't act now, we will lose the freedom we have today to organize to defend our community. We are not alone – there are thousands of students organizing across the country right now as part of a movement called Students Rise Up/ Frontline for Freedom. Through collective action we can reach a critical mass of universities to reject the compact and implement safeguards. We must also ensure that those who are already resisting aren't standing alone.

If we don't fight for our rights, we will lose them. Throughout history, student-led protests have driven major change, exposing injustice, demanding accountability, and inspiring hope for a better future. Your action *will* show support for communities suffering in silence, *will* influence the opinion of administration on the vitality of change, *will* provide accurate information about civil liberties and freedoms, and *will* aid in passing a blueprint for the fight to defend safety and civil liberties.

JOIN THE MEETING, NOVEMBER 11th @ 8PM, HILLCREST 103! Find out how students have been organizing, the challenges we've faced, and why your voice matters!

Also follow our Instagram for updates: @firewall_midd